



NATIONAL TASK FORCE ON THE ARTS BEGINS NEW CONVERSATION

The College Board's National Task Force on the Arts in Education (NTFAE) convened for their inaugural meeting on October 10-11, 2008, in New York City. The committee met to discuss the importance of early and sustained exposure to the arts in the lives of Americans and to develop strategies for making a lasting impact on the role of the arts in education.

While most people agree that the arts play a vital role in our lives, arts programs within schools are often seen as expendable and are frequently the first programs lost to budget cuts. The NTFAE will work to reverse this trend by educating policymakers and administrators about what the arts truly represent in the education and lives of our young people and by working to make the arts an inextricable component of American education. The NTFAE is seeking ways to develop and articulate an integrative vision of arts education at every level. This will include educating and empowering teachers, engaging more professional artists in the field of arts education, reaching underserved populations and showcasing the capacity of the arts to enrich, stimulate and foster innovation and creativity in every field and endeavor.

The Task Force also discussed the many challenges to integrating the arts into our current education system. Participants noted the difficulty of teaching and grading the arts within a traditional framework. The results-oriented climate in education today prohibits or inhibits nonquantifiable curricula and programs, as local school boards are pressured to show results to obtain funding. The task force plans to conduct and gather research to support policies and funding for arts programs.

With the ultimate goal of re-envisioning education in the United States and ensuring equal access to the arts for underserved populations, the task force will begin with a three-pronged approach: 1) writing a framework of best practices; 2) creating a plan for arts advocates; and 3) accumulating data to quantifiably illustrate the value of arts in education.

During the inaugural meeting, Leonard Lehrer, chair of the College Board's Arts Advisory Council, noted that local artists are great potential resources, but that students often miss out on valuable opportunities to learn from accomplished professionals because these artists lack teacher certification. One participant explained that Arizona allows specialists from various fields to become teachers with a six-week course in pedagogy. California and Texas have similar programs, however Task Force members from these states explained that many teachers' unions and charter schools are resistant to these rapid-certification programs because they find the quality of teachers is low and the turnover rate is high. Participants discussed other options for bringing artists into classrooms, specifically noting an abundance of programs that invite artists into the classroom — not as teachers, but as supplements to the curriculum.

Many members also advocated for integrating the arts into other academic disciplines. Robert Blackey, a history professor at California State University in San Bernardino, shared an example of how he incorporates acting and music into his classes in an effort to help students understand and engage with history on a personal level. He explained that learning through various cultural media deepens students' understanding of the subject matter and improves their retention. Combining skill sets and disciplinary backgrounds helps create an amalgamation of perspectives and a wholly different experience. Lester Monts, Chair of the College Board's

Board of Trustees, reminded participants that it is the integration of art forms from all over the world that is the greatest strength of our country's culture. He explained further that experiencing these art forms can help students feel connected to, and gain a better understanding of, all cultures and religions past and present.

It is often challenging to find a symbiotic partnership between pedagogy and the practice of the arts. The College Board is committed to promoting the arts as distinct subjects at all grade levels, from preschool through college, and making every effort to integrate the arts with other disciplines so that they become an essential part of academic life. The College Board also recognizes the importance of teacher training, advocacy and raising the public's awareness of the arts in education.

Nancy Rubino, director of the College Board's Office of Academic Initiatives, believes that the NTFAE will contribute to a new vision of education that will give students and teachers alike the knowledge, experience and tools to creatively and thoughtfully tackle the challenges of our 21st-century world. The task force is composed of a diverse set of interesting and influential people in the arts — teachers, professional artists, policymakers, advocates and representatives of national arts organizations and museums — all of whom have agreed to lend their voices and professional experience to the national discussion on the role of the arts in education and to shaping a national agenda to put the arts at the heart of learning for all students.